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SUBJECT: PRC/JAPAN: BEIJING SATISFIED WITH LI-ASO MEETING,
BUT TENSIONS REMAIN

REF: TOKYO 2916

Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan. Reasons 1.4
(b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) China was satisfied with the tone of the meeting between Foreign Ministers Li Zhaoxing and Taro Aso on May 23 in Doha, MFA Deputy Director of the Japan Division Lu Guijun told poloff, while cautioning that bilateral relations remain difficult. The decision to allow FM Li to meet his counterpart was only made at the last moment after much debate at State Councilor Tang's Jiaxuan's level. Lu said China was pleased with FM Aso's "good attitude." The two sides agreed to resume security talks, to increase the frequency of East China Sea dispute consultations and to discuss the establishment of a mechanism to deal with possible incidents in the disputed area. No progress was made on halting the Yasukuni Shrine visits and China believes Prime Minister Koizumi will visit Yasukuni again before leaving office. Beijing will strongly criticize Koizumi and temporarily slow East China Sea talks but will not allow demonstrations. A Li-Aso meeting at the July 28 ASEAN Regional Forum in Kuala Lumpur is possible. Contacts from other Embassies report that the PRC believes that its hard-line on Yasukuni is working and has led FM Aso to moderate the tone of his remarks on China. End Summary.

¶2. (C) MFA Asian Department Deputy Division Director for Japan Lu Guijun told poloff on June 2 that PRC Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing made two main points to Japan Foreign Minister Taro Aso during their May 23 meeting in Doha. First, good relations with Japan are essential to China. Second, the bilateral relationship will only develop positively once the history issue is resolved correctly. While there was no progress in resolving specific historical issues or in halting the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, China was pleased that FM Aso had a "good attitude" during the meeting and did not give any indication that he would visit Yasukuni himself, according to Lu.

¶3. (C) Lu said FM Li and FM Aso agreed to hold security talks this year for the first time since 2004, with Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei and Deputy Foreign Minister Tsuneo Nishida expected to lead those discussions. The two foreign ministers agreed to hold more frequent consultations on the East China Sea dispute and discuss establishing a communication mechanism to deal with possible incidents in the area. Lu said that the key points for China were that Japan has a better understanding of Beijing's position on the history issue and the two sides have agreed on the need for cooperation and dialogue in a wide range of areas, despite the ongoing tensions.

PRC: Bilateral Relations Still "Very Difficult"

14. (C) Lu took pains to point out that despite China's satisfaction with the overall tone of the meeting, Sino-Japanese relations are essentially unchanged and remain "very difficult" because there is no resolution to the Yasukuni Shrine issue. China believes Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will visit to Yasukuni once more before departing office. This would force China to criticize Japan and to suspend bilateral discussions, such as on the East China Sea, for a couple of months. However, because Koizumi will be stepping down in September, long-term fallout from a final visit to Yasukuni is unlikely. Lu said it is still unclear whether Koizumi's successor will visit the Yasukuni Shrine, leaving the current situation tense and the future unclear. In any case, there will be no anti-Japanese demonstrations because the Chinese government will not allow it. "It is within the PRC government's power to control this situation," Lu said.

PRC Delayed Approval Until Last Minute

15. (C) Lu said the decision to allow FM Li to meet with his Japanese counterpart was not made until the very last moment because there was debate about whether a meeting between the two top diplomats would be beneficial to relations. The discussion and eventual decision was made at State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan's level. As to whether Foreign Ministers Li and Aso meet at the July 28 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Kuala Lumpur, Lu said China will look at the situation and conditions at that time before making a decision. He anticipates that once again that there will be debate at the

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highest levels of the PRC Government and a decision will not be reached until just prior to the event.

Other Embassies: PRC Believes Japan Policy is Working

16. (C) At a regular meeting of French, UK, Russian, Japanese and U.S. political officers reporting on external issues, French Political Counselor Fabrice Mauries said that PRC EVFM Dai Bingguo had recently told President Chirac's Diplomatic Advisor Maurice Gourdot-Montaigne during their May 14-16 Strategic Dialogue that Beijing believes its approach toward Japan is working. Dai said that China has taken a tough line toward Japan following PM Koizumi's most recent visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, to the point of cutting off meetings at the FM level and other regular exchanges. Acknowledging that this angered the Japanese, Dai reportedly told Gourdot-Montaigne that the PRC approach has led to greater concern on the part of the Japanese business community. The PRC has also taken a very tough line with FM Aso, complaining strongly about his statements on Taiwan and China. Dai told Gourdot-Montaigne that the PRC believes that Aso suffered politically from his sustained failure to meet with his PRC counterpart, which has led him to moderate his public statements on China. Dai told Gourdot-Montaigne that Beijing believed that it was now time to hold a meeting with FM Aso in order to show Japanese politicians the benefits of taking a more moderate approach toward China.

17. (C) Russian Embassy Political Officer Oleg Serov agreed that the PRC believes its approach toward Japan is working. He said that both official and academic contacts tell the Russian Embassy that the current PRC strategy is to take a very hard line on the Yasukuni Shrine in hopes of deterring future visits by Prime Ministers. Serov said that a senior Communist Party official (NFI) recently told the Russian Ambassador that Beijing understands that Koizumi cannot show flexibility under pressure and that PRC tactics are alienating many Japanese. However, the official argued that the PRC approach has led to greater public debate about the

Shrine within Japan, as well as causing the leading candidates to be the next PM to moderate the tone of their remarks on both China and the Shrine.

18. (C) Japanese Embassy Political Counselor Kazuhiro Suzuki disagreed, arguing that it is the PRC that is changing its tone by agreeing to a meeting between the foreign ministers. He then acknowledged that PRC officials believe that their approach to Japan is working and complained that Beijing is using the same tactics it has used against Taiwan by writing off PM Koizumi while trying to reach out to business and opposition groups to build support for its position. He said that the PRC has avoided attacking Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe for his remarks on the Yasukuni Shrine and on China, focusing instead on FM Aso's statements. Suzuki said that Japanese Embassy contacts uniformly say that Beijing expects Abe to replace PM Koizumi, although former Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda improving poll results are drawing considerable attention from PRC Japan experts.

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